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THE COMMUNISTS'  
"COMBAT STRENGTH" IN  
CAMBODIA

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Summary and Conclusions

1. The CIA Order of Battle (OB) estimate for the Communists' "combat strength" in Cambodia in early 1972 was a range of from 45,000 to 65,000 men.\* The estimate consisted of from 30,000 to 35,000 Vietnamese and from 15,000 to 30,000 Khmers.

2. This estimate is far too low. A more realistic figure for "combat strength" would almost certainly have exceeded 100,000 -- perhaps by a considerable margin -- and would include at least 50,000 Vietnamese and 50,000 Khmers. The missing soldiers are among the Communists' best troops.

3. The higher estimate does not take into account this season's package of NVA infiltrators bound for the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN). There are 40,000 of these, probably including at least 25,000 combatants. Nor does the higher estimate include Khmer guerrillas, who, according to the CIA definition, are not part of the "combat strength." The number of KC guerrillas probably exceeds 50,000, of whom perhaps 10,000 are armed, and the rest trained, some indifferently, some well. The KC guerrillas with weapons are concentrated at the South Vietnamese border.

\*VC/NVA Combat Forces in Cambodia Since The Deposition of Sihanouk, ER IM 72-36 March 1972. (Attached.)

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4. The higher estimates have two implications:

- a. First, the VC/NVA, with a potential of 75,000 or more combatants deployed in or near Cambodia,\* are a much greater threat to southern South Vietnam than hitherto realized. Their current operations in GVN III Corps already point in this direction.
- b. Second, the KC, with over 50,000 combatants (not including guerrillas) probably have more than enough men to mind the store in Cambodia, even if most VC/NVA combat soldiers cross the border. In fact, since a large proportion of the omitted Khmers belong to the mobile units of the KC Main Forces (of whom none is listed in the CIA OB), they may be capable of a respectable offensive of their own -- stiffened, of course, by Viet Cong-run formations.

5. The Vietnamese and Khmers missing from the OB in early 1972 are dealt with in that order.

Missing Vietnamese

6. Two reasons are behind the OB's underestimate of Vietnamese Communist soldiers in Cambodia. First,

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\*The more than 75,000 includes the 30,000 to 35,000 in the OB, 20,000 more missing from the OB, and the estimated 25,000 infiltrators deemed combatants. Many of the at least 75,000 have now crossed into South Vietnam.

the OB omits large numbers of small Viet Cong units. Second, the units listed in the OB are carried under-strength. The missing soldiers may exceed 20,000 (roughly equivalent to the combat element of three divisions). They are estimated as follows:

a. Those in small units -	15,000
b. Those missing from units already in the OB -	<u>5,000</u>
	20,000

7. The CIA OB for VC/NVA in Cambodia in early 1972 listed divisions and regiments, but not independent battalions, companies, and platoons. There were then probably at least 40 independent VC/NVA combat battalions in Cambodia, as well as large numbers of lesser units. They are subordinate to the five VC-run Military Regions in Cambodia (C10, C20, C30, C40, and the Phuoc Long Front), and to COSVN. The aggregate strengths of the small units missing from the OB are broken down roughly as follows:

C-20 -	2,000
C-40 -	5,000
C30 and Phuoc Long -	3,000
C10 and COSVN -	<u>5,000</u>
	15,000

8. The OB's most obvious omissions are in Military Region C-20. Apparently because C-20 lacks regiments, the OB indicates C-20 has no combatants whatsoever. However the evidence clearly indicates C-20 has at least five independent infantry battalions, including the D140, D160, D170, D190 and D200. Given the apparent numbering sequence, there

may also be D150 and D180 battalions, making a total of seven. In addition, C-20 has several combat companies and platoons. Therefore the number of combatants missing from the OB in C-20 may well exceed 2000.

9. Similarly, the OB for Military Region C-40 -- although it lists 6 to 7 regiments -- omits independent battalions, and companies. However, the evidence suggests C-40 has at least 14 combat battalions, apparently including the Z12, Z16, Z17, Z18, Z19, Z20, Z21, Z22, Z24, Z25, Z27, Z28, Z30 and Z32, as well as large numbers of smaller units. The unlisted formations include sappers, scouts, and combat engineers, who are among the Communists' best troops. The number of combatants missing from the C40 OB thus may exceed 5000.

10. Likewise, the reporting suggests that C30 and the Phuoc Long Front have ten independent battalions, and a large number of lesser formations. Their strength probably exceeds 3000.

11. Unfortunately, evidence is either non-existent or underdeveloped concerning battalion-size and smaller units subordinate to C10 and COSVN. Military Region C10, in Cambodia's remote northeast, probably has only a few such units -- mostly AA and security formations. COSVN, on the other hand, has always had many smaller combat units. A plausible guess as to the aggregate strength of small formations under C10 and COSVN might be in the neighborhood of 5000.

12. The omissions in the VC/NVA OB from Cambodia in early 1972 parallel those in the VC/NVA OB for South Vietnam prior to the Tet offensive of 1968. The pre-Tet OB also omitted large numbers of small units, and carried listed formations understrength. (See "Draft Working Paper" entitled The Probable Strength of the Viet Cong Main and Local and North Vietnamese Army Forces in South Vietnam: 31 January 1968, which laid out the details of the

pre-Tet omissions.) Although many of the Vietnamese currently missing from the OB are subordinate to commands supposedly targetted at Cambodia, there seems little reason why these soldiers could not be transferred to South Vietnam if the Viet Cong saw fit.

#### The Missing Cambodians

13. As noted, the OB also carries too few Khmer Communists (KC). Since the OB's omissions have been dealt with before at length, this memorandum will not belabor evidence already presented, which is voluminous.\* Nonetheless new evidence confirms the old. Recent reports indicate the KC are continuing to form new units as fast as they can arm them.

14. Since early 1971, the KC have been particularly active in putting together KC region-level Main Force formations, of which the CIA OB carries none at all. The evidence suggests the KC now have between five and ten regional regiments (possibly including the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 7th Regiments)\*\* and at least fifteen region-level Main Force battalions (perhaps including the 1st, 2nd, 6th, 8th, 9th, 12th, 13th, 15th, 17th, 28th, 35th, 82nd, 103d, 106th, 153d).\*\* If one also considers region-level companies -- about which hard evidence is minimal -- the "combat strength" of the KC regions may be in the neighborhood of 10,000 to 15,000. They are the best soldiers the KC possess.

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\*See the 23-page SRS Memorandum For The Record, of 27 December 1971, which comments on the CIA memorandum Khmer Communist Combat Forces in Cambodia ER IM 71-218, November 1971. The CIA memorandum put forth the estimate of 15,000 to 30,000 KC combatants.

\*\*Cover designations abound, so some of these designations may be inaccurate.

15. The missing region troops, together with other already-dealt-with omissions from the subregion and district levels, make it likely that the KC combat strength (as defined by CIA) is something well over 50,000 instead of the 15,000 to 30,000 KC carried in the official OB.

#### Other Considerations

16. Two other considerations point to an even higher number of enemy combatants in Cambodia.

17. First, there are the infiltrators coming from North Vietnam. Of the 40,000 on the way to COSVN, perhaps 25,000 can safely be considered combatants. These should be added to the 50,000 to 55,000 VC/NVA combatants already there in early 1972,\* making for a grand total of 75,000 to 80,000 VC/NVA combatants.

18. Second, there are the KC guerrillas, who are not carried as part of the "combat strength" by the OB. Estimates based on population statistics suggest that well over 50,000 KC guerrillas exist of whom perhaps 10,000 may be armed, the rest trained. The armed guerrillas are largely deployed near the South Vietnamese border. In the event the KC and VC go on the rampage in Cambodia, large numbers of guerrillas could be upgraded to higher-level KC units.

\*50,000-55,000 was derived by combining the number in the OB 30,000-35,000, with the 20,000 soldiers missing from the OB.